

BOOK REVIEW

SYLVAN T. RUNKEL AND DEAN M. ROOSA. 2010. **Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest**. (ISBN: 978-1-58729-796-0, pbk.). University of Iowa Press, 119 West Park Road, 100 Kuhl House, Iowa City, Iowa 52242, U.S.A. (**Orders:** www.uiowapress.org, 319-335-2000). \$29.95, 308 pp., 131 color photos, 5.5" x 8.5".

Growing up in America, it is hard not to be exposed to the wonderful tales of Laura Ingles Wilder and her family's efforts to survive the blessings and hardships of life on the prairie. As a girl, I envisioned myself as Laura, romping through the tallgrass prairie with my pup at my side, experiencing the many adventures from eking out a living from the hard black earth, to harsh winters, to encounters with Native Americans, to one-room schoolhouses, and to lying by a stream watching the butterflies flit back and forth.

Having recently moved from Southern Wisconsin, the land of the Tallgrass Prairie, to Northern Texas' Blackland Prairie, it was meant to be that I review this wonderful guidebook, "Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie, The Upper Midwest" by Sylvan T. Runkel and Dean M. Roosa. The prairie is in my blood. I would even go so far as to describe myself as a "prairie Rambler" as the authors are described in the book's forward, although in no way can I claim the expertise of these two esteemed prairie experts.

Once covering approximately 221,436 square miles from Canada to Texas, tallgrass prairie was subject to the natural conditions of grazing buffalo, harsh winters, and prairie fires. Humans, however, have interfered with its natural cycles. With the invention of the steel plow, the rich and tough prairie lands soon became farmland. Today, the tallgrass prairie is estimated to cover only 1% of its original expanse. Remnants of the tallgrass prairie remain dispersed among the Upper Midwest states. In Wisconsin alone, only about 4,000 acres of tallgrass prairie remain.

Runkel and Roosa offer us a wonderful guidebook with stunning full page, color photographs by botanist Thomas Rosburg, that make one's heart long for the tallgrass prairie. The book is organized by season beginning with the early blooming pasque flower, followed with summer beauties such as Maximilian sunflower and prairie coreopsis, and ending with the lovely fall blazing star and closed gentian. Prairie grasses such as big bluestem, Indian grass, and switchgrass, among others, are an integral part of the book. The authors provide readers with both common and Latin names, as well as definitions which help the amateur wildflower enthusiast remember them. They provide detailed plant and habitat descriptions as well as historical and medicinal uses of the plant by Native Americans and pioneers.

While primarily a guidebook, the authors make an important link to the need for conservation of these vital and yet sensitive prairie lands. As they say, "If the prairie goes, an entire community is lost forever—a community that was the foundation of our Midwestern society." Find yourself a copy of this book, a pair of boots, and go ramble on the prairie. You too will be convinced of its beauty, and the need to protect it.

—Gwen Michele Thomas, Texas Master Naturalist & Volunteer,
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BOOKS RECEIVED/REVIEWS FORTHCOMING

PATRICIA FOLLEY. 2011. **The Guide to Oklahoma Wildflowers**. (ISBN: 978-1-60938-046-5, pbk.). University of Iowa Press, 119 W. Park Road, 100 Kuhl House, Iowa City, IA 52242-1000, U.S.A. (**Orders:** <http://www.uiowapress.org/books/2011-fall/guide-oklahoma-wildflowers.htm>, Phone: 319-335-2000, Fax: 319-335-2055, Phone orders: 800-621-2736, Fax orders: 800-621-8476, E-mail: uipress@uiowa.edu). \$39.95, 312 pp., 415 color photos, 1 color map, 6" x 9".

CRAIG PITTMAN. 2012. **The Scent of Scandal: Greed, Betrayal, and the World's Most Beautiful Orchid**. (ISBN: 978-0-8130-3974-9, hbk.). University Press of Florida, 15 Northwest 15th St., Gainesville, Florida 32611-2079, U.S.A. (**Orders:** <http://www.upf.com>). \$24.95, 299 pp., b&w photos, 6" x 9".